

PRONUNCIATION NOTES

Syllables of Japanese

Vowels

a	i	u	e	o
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Combinations of Consonants and Vowels

ka	ki	ku	ke	ko
sa	shi	su	se	so
ta	chi	tsu	te	to
na	ni	nu	ne	no
ha	hi	fu	he	ho
ma	mi	mu	me	mo
ya		yu		yo
ra	ri	ru	re	ro
wa				
n				

ga	gi	gu	ge	go
za	zi	zu	ze	zo
da			de	do
ba	bi	bu	be	bo
pa	pi	pu	pe	po

kya	kyu	kyo
sha	shu	sho
cha	chu	cho
nya	nyu	nyo
hya	hyu	hyo
mya	myu	myo

rya	ryu	ryo
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gya	gyu	gyo
ja	ju	jo

bya	byu	byo
pya	pyu	pyo

Syllabic Length

One of the features in pronouncing Japanese is its syllabic length. A word or a phrase should be pronounced with the same length. For each syllable, the same amount of time must be spent.

Nihongo de itte kudasai.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12


moo ichido
1 2 3 4 5


minna de
1 2 3 4

Each number shows the number of syllables which have the same length.

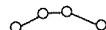
ACCENT

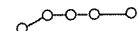
Japanese syllables are pronounced with equal length and stress. When they are accented it has more to do with pitch. So, Japanese accent is called pitch accent. In the pitch accent, there is a higher pitch and a lower pitch.

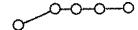
áto ni tsúite


ko^htáete


If the first syllable of a word is not accented, or if a word has no accent, the first syllable of the word has lower pitch.

minná de


nihongo de


moo ichido


Vowels in Sequence

In Japanese one vowel can be followed by another vowel, for example, /ai/, /ue/, /ie/, /oi/. In such a sequence of two different vowels, the pronunciation of each vowel should be short, clear, and even in length.

Sequences of the same vowel also frequently occur in Japanese, for example, /aa/, /ii/, /uu/, /ee/, /oo/. Such sequences are sometimes called “long” vowels to distinguish them from the single or “short” vowels. The distinction between long and short vowels is vital in Japanese because, as the following examples show, it can make a difference between the meanings of words.

<i>e</i>	“picture”	.....	<i>ee</i>	“yes”
<i>imasu</i>	“to stay”	.....	<i>iimasu</i>	“to say”
<i>yoji</i>	“four o’clock”	.....	<i>yooji</i>	“business”

Devoiced Vowels

Whenever the vowels /i/ or /u/ in an unaccented syllable occur between two voiceless consonants, i.e. /p/, /t/, /k/, /s/ or /h/, the /i/ or /u/ either becomes devoiced or disappears entirely.

<i>h(i)-tó-tsu</i>	“one”	<i>k(i)-tá</i>	“came”
<i>ts(u)-kí</i>	“moon”	<i>s(u)-kí</i>	“to like”

This phenomenon may also occur when either *i* or *u* occurs at the end of a sentence after a voiceless consonant.

Hon des(u). “It is a book.”

Double Consonants

Most Japanese syllables consist of a sequence of a consonant and vowel or simply a vowel alone. However, some syllables consist of a consonant, which is followed by another identical consonant. A sequence of two identical consonants is conventionally referred to as a double consonant. The consonants which are capable of occurring in such sequences are /p/, /t/, /k/ and /s/.

<i>ippai</i>	“full”		
<i>katta</i>	“won”	.....	<i>kata</i> “shoulder”
<i>sakka</i>	“writer”	.....	<i>saka</i> “slope”
<i>nisshi</i>	“diary”	.....	<i>nishi</i> “west”

Palatalized Consonants

All the consonants except /y/, /w/ and /d/ can be palatalized. This palatalized consonant is written by adding /y/, e.g. /ky-/. /ky-/ has to be treated as one consonant which, when followed by vowels /a/, /u/ and /o/ comprises a whole syllable.